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ABSTRACT

This sourcebook contains advice for the regular classroom teacher who plans to receive a visually impaired child into his or her class. It specifically emphasizes development of positive teacher attitudes. Its style is a combination of narrative exposition and imaginary dialogue between an elementary grade teacher and her school's itinerant teacher for visually impaired children. One chapter on overcoming initial apprehension points out that many teachers worry that visually impaired students will place extensive demands on their schedules, will require changes in teaching styles, may not be accepted by classmates, and may not be able to participate fully in the educational program. The discussion outlines different roles and responsibilities of the regular teacher and the resource teacher in providing for the child's special needs. Also described is the legally-required individualized education program for every child receiving special education services. Another chapter on encouraging positive attitudes suggests ways for the teacher to (1) locate the visually impaired child in the classroom, (2) encourage social activities with classmates which demonstrate the child's normalcy in other areas, and (3) allow the child to develop a degree of independence and self-confidence. Two chapters on making it work and working with parents illustrate the benefits of providing special materials for the visually impaired student, adapting curriculum and test materials for the special student in ways that enrich the entire class, and establishing a relationship of constructive involvement with the child's parents. (AV)

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Encouraging Successful Mainstreaming of the Visually Impaired Child

MAVIS Sourcebook 2

by
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Sourcebook 3: *Teaching the Visually Impaired Child in the Regular Classroom*
Sourcebook 4: *Social Studies for the Visually Impaired Child*
Sourcebook 5: *Important Concerns in the Education of Visually Impaired Children*
Sourcebook 6: *Resources for Teaching Social Studies in the Mainstreamed Classroom*

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Project MAVIS
Materials Adaptations for Visually
Impaired Students in the
Social Studies

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1. Introduction

Several elementary school teachers were recently told they would have visually impaired students assigned to their classes when they returned to school in the fall. The teachers reacted to the news with the following comments and questions:

—Just what is a visually impaired student? Can the student see or not?

—I have no special training in this area; I'm not sure I can handle it.

—I have 27 children in my classroom already. I just don't have the extra time a disabled child will need.

—To whom can I go for help?

—Where will we put all the extra equipment kids like that need?

—How will the visually impaired student fit in socially with the other children?

—Can the student keep up with the rest of the class academically?

—I just don't want to cope with the parents of a disabled child. They don't understand all the demands on a classroom teacher.

Such feelings and concerns have been shared by many classroom teachers across the country on finding that they were to have a visually impaired student as part of their class. Most teachers have never worked with a visually impaired child, and many are apprehensive about teaching such a child. Such feelings are both natural and acceptable.

Nevertheless, children with visual impairments *can* and *do* become successful students in regular schools. Most visually impaired students are more like other children than different from them. Their lives need not be radically different from those of their classmates; they can live at home with their families and be active members of their neighborhoods, communities, and schools. In the United States today, many visually impaired children are being educated in regular classrooms and leading essentially normal lives.

This booklet is written in the hope that it will be a source of information, encouragement, and support to you—the teacher in a regular classroom—as you prepare to teach a visually impaired child. We do not plan to paint a picture that is altogether "rosy," nor to imply that the integration of visually impaired children into regular classes is a smooth, trouble-free venture. On the contrary! Visually impaired children, like all children, vary widely in their abilities and disabilities. Problems may occur.

We do believe, however, that if you are an effective teacher of children with normal vision, you will be an effective teacher of children with impaired vision. Your classroom is an environment that can enrich the lives of all your students.

Since this booklet is intended primarily for teachers, we have "invited" two teachers to assist in our consideration of the visually impaired child in the regular classroom. Although these teachers are fictional characters, many of the topics they discuss have been derived from conversations with real teachers. Before we meet them, let's have a brief look at their backgrounds:

ELLEN MILES is the itinerant teacher for visually impaired children in a suburban school district in Missouri. She received her Bachelor's degree in education from Moorhead State College (Minnesota) and then completed a Master's degree in special education at the University of Texas, with emphasis in the area of visual impairment. Ellen spent 3 years as a teacher at a state residential school for the blind before assuming her present position, which she has held for 3 years.

SARAH FAIRCHILD is the teacher of a fourth grade class in the same school district. She received her Bachelor's degree in education from Illinois State University and has been an elementary school teacher for 4 years. Sarah has never had a visually impaired child in her class.

Sarah and Ellen have both been involved in the staffing for a visually impaired boy named Bruce Hammond. The decision reached by the planning committee—which also included the school principal, the guidance counselor, Bruce's teacher from the school for the blind (where he is now a third-grader), and Bruce's parents—was that Bruce would be placed in Sarah's class the following fall. Let's tune in on Sarah and Ellen's first conversation after the decision has been made.

2. Overcoming Initial Apprehension

ELLEN: Sarah, now that the decision has been made to place Bruce in your class next fall, you don't seem too happy about it.

SARAH: Well, I'll have to be honest. I just really feel unsure about the situation. I mean, I understand why his family wants him to live at home and go to school here rather than stay at the state school, but he's doing so well there. I'm just afraid things won't work out that well for him here.

ELLEN: I can understand your apprehension, but as I said in the staffing, Bruce is going to have to live in a world where not everyone is visually impaired. Joining your class will help him begin to adjust to that world. You may also find that your sighted students will benefit from seeing what a visually impaired child is capable of doing. After all, each child is "different" in some way.

SARAH: I know that what you're saying is right—but I feel kind of overwhelmed; I'm not sure I'll be able to cope.

ELLEN: In my experience, having a child like Bruce in your class is not as difficult as you might think at first. Oh, it's not simple. Things aren't just going to happen automatically, and there probably will be some extra work. But I'm here to help you, so you're not totally on your own. Are there any particular questions you have at the moment? Many times one or two small things will be bothering a teacher; maybe we can dispense with some of them right now.

SARAH: Well, this may sound a little silly, but I'm thinking about how often I say "see" and "look" with the kids, and I might have to change this habit, right?

ELLEN: Wrong! As you know, Bruce does have enough useful vision to allow him to read large print and write legibly. Even totally blind youngsters, though, use terms such as "see" and "look." Once I had a student who insisted that she didn't feel the words in her braille book—she saw them with her fingers. You and your other students really don't need to change your vocabulary at all.

SARAH: I'd feel awful if anything happened to Bruce's vision in my class. I mean, can't he damage his eyes if he reads too much or if it's too dark in the room or if . . .?

ELLEN: Or if the print is too small or if he gets too close to the page? You know, not too many years ago, children like Bruce would be put in "sight-saving" classes and told, "Careful! Don't use your vision too much or you may lose what little you have left." Today, we know that the eyes benefit from being used. I'll be working with Bruce regularly to help him learn to use his vision as efficiently as possible. You can also encourage him to use his vision in classroom activities and let me know how he's doing. Other than that, it's not a problem you need to worry about.

SARAH: This talk has helped a little, but I'm still pretty nervous.

ELLEN: You might find it helpful to talk to Bob Sams. He's a sixth grade teacher at Lincoln Elementary who had a partially sighted student mainstreamed into his class last year. He was nervous at first, too, but he ended up feeling it was one of the best years of his teaching career.

SARAH: Really? I guess I will have a talk with him. Say, it's getting late. I'm going to have to run pretty soon.

ELLEN: Me, too, but before we go, let's set up a time to make some plans before school is out this spring. There are a lot of things we need to start planning for—what textbook and testing materials you'll want me to order in large print, what special equipment we'll need to get, and how you can set up your classroom to accommodate Bruce's things without crowding out the rest of the class. We'll need to start making plans for completing Bruce's IEP—individualized education program—too.

SARAH: How soon does that have to be done?

ELLEN: Well, since Bruce will be new to the district next fall, the law gives us until 30 days after his enrollment to finish the IEP.

SARAH: Will it involve a lot of work?

ELLEN: Some, but we've got a good start on it. There are basically five areas that have to be covered in the IEP. The first is the present educational performance level of the child. We've got that information from the evaluation team at the residential school. The second area is the annual goals and objectives for the child. We've written those in broad terms in the staffing sessions, but you and I will need to do some more specific work on them, with Bruce's parents of course. The third area is a statement of the special education and related services to be provided to the child and the extent to which the child will participate in the regular school program. That we decided at

the staffing: I'll work with Bruce individually three times a week at the beginning of the year; the rest of the time he'll be in the regular classroom. The fourth thing to be covered is the projected initiation date and duration of special education services. That's pretty obvious—the beginning to the end of the school year. Finally, we have to specify appropriate criteria and evaluation procedures for determining whether the goals given in the IEP have been met. We may have to work on that one a bit, although since Bruce will be spending almost all of his time in the regular school program, the standard evaluation procedures you use will probably be sufficient in most cases.

SARAH: That bit about the goals and evaluation procedures scares me a little. What happens if Bruce doesn't meet the goals we set?

ELLEN: The situation is the same as it is with any other student. You do your level best to help the child meet the goals, but reaching them isn't mandatory. I know there are some lawsuits in progress right now in which teachers are being sued because students didn't perform as expected. Most suits don't involve disabled kids, but if the courts decide that the teacher is legally responsible for students' meeting certain goals, then the same rule would apply to disabled kids. Right now, though, the IEP goals aren't legally binding. But I've really kept you long enough tonight. How about next Tuesday after school for a planning meeting?

SARAH: Suits me. See you then.

The placing of a visually impaired child in a regular classroom presents a variety of problems and challenges. Sarah's apprehensive feelings about facing these problems are legitimate and understandable. She is an effective teacher who is committed to providing the best possible education to all her students and concerned about how the new student will affect the general functioning of her class. Will Bruce make extensive demands on her already-busy schedule? Will he be accepted by his classmates? Will he be able to participate fully in the educational program? Will she have to change her teaching style? Good teachers ask such questions.

While the classroom teacher bears the primary responsibility for dealing with the problems and challenges of mainstreaming on a day-to-day basis, supportive services are provided in almost every district in the United States. These services are usually embodied in a special vision consultant or a resource room or itinerant teacher with expertise in education of the visually impaired.* Understanding that help is available

*Throughout this sourcebook, specially trained teachers of the visually impaired will be referred to as "resource teachers," as they serve as a resource to classroom teachers regardless of their official designation.

and that the job of teaching the visually impaired child is not his or hers alone is reassuring to the classroom teacher.

Teaching a visually impaired child is in fact a cooperative venture. A student's special educational program will be successful only to the extent that all persons involved with the student's education work together as a team. Each teacher should assume certain clearly understood areas of responsibility and should respect the other's role. They should be available at designated times to plan for the child's needs, to keep each other informed, and to review the child's progress.

The specific roles and responsibilities of the regular classroom teacher and the resource teacher may vary, depending on the resources available in the district and the level of services appropriate for a particular child. In general, the regular classroom teacher would be expected to:

—assume the primary responsibility for the visually impaired child's day-to-day educational program.

—inform the resource teacher of curriculum, lesson plans, tests, and assignments in advance, to allow time for obtaining or modifying materials as needed.

—facilitate the integration of the visually impaired child into class activities.

—communicate with the child's parents.

—plan educational goals for the child and evaluate his or her progress.

—maintain a classroom environment that encourages the fullest participation of all students.

The resource teacher would generally be expected to:

—provide inservice training for the regular classroom teacher and other appropriate personnel.

—instruct the visually impaired child directly in special skills which are not part of the regular curriculum, such as braille, orientation and mobility, and utilization of low vision.

—provide special materials and equipment which may be needed (such as braille writers, optical aids, special writing paper, and an abacus) and instruct the child in their use.

—be aware of the specific nature of the child's eye impairment and make recommendations to the regular teacher regarding the child's visual functioning.

—arrange for supplementary instruction to the visually impaired child in areas with which the child is having difficulty.

—communicate with the child's parents.

—offer support, suggestions, and resources to the classroom teacher and other staff members and assist in the maximum possible degree of integration into the educational program.

—participate in planning education goals for the child and evaluating his or her process.

Good communication and professional respect are critical. The regular teacher and the resource teacher both have important roles to play. Each can reinforce and support the work of the other.

Sarah and Ellen made a good start toward establishing a working relationship at their first meeting. Since that time, they've done even more. Before school was out for the summer, they made a number of plans for the following fall. Sarah gave Ellen a list of textbooks she would be using in the fall and Ellen made arrangements to obtain them in large print. They also decided to order a lamp and a special desk with an adjustable top for Bruce's use in the classroom. They designed a classroom arrangement that would fully integrate Bruce into the class without interfering with other students' space needs. Ellen suggested some materials that Sarah might look at over the summer for ideas on mainstreaming a visually impaired student.

The week before school opened in the fall was also a busy one. Ellen conducted an inservice workshop for all the teachers at Sarah's school. Both teachers worked together to make sure that all the materials Bruce would need were available for the opening of classes. Since that time, they have met briefly each week to discuss Bruce's progress and finish his IEP.

As its name implies, the IEP is a plan to meet the special educational needs of the disabled child. Public Law 94-142—The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975—requires that an IEP be prepared for all students receiving special education services. An IEP must be in effect within 30 days after a child is enrolled in a district or is identified as being eligible for special education programs. The IEPs must be revised annually; revisions must be in effect by the beginning of every school year.

Development of the IEP is the responsibility of a team which includes a representative of the school, such as the principal or guidance counselor, the child's teacher, the child's parents, and the child (if appropriate). The responsibility of the regular classroom teacher in preparing the IEP will vary, depending on the child's placement and need for modifications in the regular school program, since only those areas in which the student requires modifications must be covered in the IEP. Because Bruce's visual impairment does require special materials in most academic areas and some modifications of activities, Sarah is participating fully in development of Bruce's IEP.

Let's join Sarah and Ellen now for their weekly conference at the end of the third week of school.

3. Encouraging Positive Attitudes

SARAH: Come on in and sit down. Since things have slowed down a little bit this week, I thought we could take time for a cup of coffee.

ELLEN: Thanks. These first few weeks really have been hectic. But I know we're both glad to have finished Bruce's IEP at the conference with his parents last week. How have things been going in class? Is the arrangement we designed working out?

SARAH: It's great except for one thing. Bruce still can't see the chalkboard from where's he's sitting and he doesn't really like having a friend make a carbon copy of the board work for him, so he keeps jumping up and down to read what's on the chalkboard.

ELLEN: Well, at least I'm glad he doesn't feel self-conscious about not being able to see the board. However, there are a couple of things we can do to alleviate the problem. First, you can be sure to read aloud whatever you write on the chalkboard. That way, Bruce can write important things down from the oral input and go up to the board later to copy longer lists. Most teachers find that oral input helps the other kids too. The other thing we can do is see if the janitor could help put wheels on Bruce's chair. He'd be able to get to the board without jumping up and down then. I'll check with Mr. Payne on my way out tonight.

SARAH: Those are both good ideas. Thanks, Ellen. But now let me tell you what's really got me concerned. It's the other kids. They were really excited about having Bruce in the class at first. Everybody wanted to take him around the school. I'll bet they showed him where the water fountain was at least 50 times! But lately the novelty seems to be wearing off. Today at recess Bruce just sat by a wall and listened to his portable radio while most of the others played softball.

ELLEN: Lots of visually impaired youngsters *do* have a rough time being accepted. In fact, children with low vision, like Bruce, often find it harder to get along with sighted classmates than do children who are totally blind. I guess it's partly because

the kids don't always know what Bruce can and can't see, what things he needs help with, and how they should act with him. But there are lots of other factors too, like how well Bruce does in his school work and how he handles group situations. It's hard to put your finger on a single cause.

SARAH: I know what you mean. The other day, Billy Turner—one of the real active tigers in my class—noticed that Bruce's handwriting was . . . well . . . kind of messy, and called the other kids over to look at it.

ELLEN: Low vision students often write imperfectly because they *see* imperfectly. (Looking at Bruce's paper.) Hmm . . . it's certainly not beautiful handwriting, but this special bold-line paper we ordered does seem to be helping. I'll plan to work with him on writing during the next few weeks. Another thing—Bruce is about ready to learn to type. Although he can't type class notes because of the noise, he can type assignments and that should help.

SARAH: That sounds good. But what about encouraging him to participate in group activities with the other students?

ELLEN: As you well know, you can't force kids to like each other. But let's think of some activities that would show the other students just what Bruce can do. That way they may feel more comfortable with him in an informal setting. You might organize some recess activities around games you know Bruce plays, like four-square and tag. Another good idea is to let Bruce show some of his special skills. Oh, not in a way that would spotlight him at the expense of the other students, but maybe you could have a hobby day when all the kids demonstrate their hobbies. I know Bruce has quite a shell collection and he may have other special interests that would show his classmates that he's not so different from them.

SARAH: I like those ideas. That way Bruce would not only be learning from the other students, he would be a role model for them as well. I think that's really important because it so often seems that a lot of the interactions that Bruce is involved in are ones in which someone else is helping him. He's dependent—someone's showing him how to get to the lunchroom or copying what's on the board for him. If he had a chance to show the other kids what he can do, well, that would be great. And it might help us all—including me—better understand when he does and doesn't need help. We all want to be so sure that he's getting the help he needs, I think we sometimes overdo it.

ELLEN: You know, Sarah, I think you've just put your finger on one of the most challenging questions in mainstreaming—how much help is enough. Your classroom is a wonderful oppor-

tunity for Bruce to develop some independence and confidence in himself and what he can do. I feel that the most effective teachers encourage children to be as self-sufficient as possible. Bruce shouldn't need help getting around the building or taking care of his things. I'd say when in doubt, give him the chance to do it for himself.

SARAH: Last week it was Bruce's turn to empty the wastebaskets and arrange the chairs at the end of each day. After someone showed him what to do, he did just fine.

ELLEN: Glad that you've added him to the "duty roster!" Knowing Bruce, I'm sure he can take part in most of your class activities successfully. It's also true, though, that he is going to require help with certain things throughout his life. He won't be able to drive a car, for example.

SARAH: I guess he needs to learn how to ask for help when necessary and how to politely decline it if he can do something for himself.

ELLEN: That's right. Anything else you can think of? I'm due at the high school.

SARAH: Just one thing, and I'm not sure it's a good idea. Since Bruce is the only visually impaired child in our school, I wondered if it would be helpful for him to get together with some other visually impaired kids once in a while, especially an older boy or girl that he might look up to.

ELLEN: That's an excellent idea, Sarah. I know a few people who would enjoy meeting Bruce and might be good friends and "models" for him. Let me make some phone calls and I'll get back to you.

SARAH: OK. See you next week.

Our second visit with Ellen and Sarah illustrates that problems that arise in a mainstreamed classroom can range from those that are simply solved to ones that are more difficult to address. The question of location of the visually impaired child in the classroom is a common one for which there are many possible solutions. The key is to be flexible. Use your powers of observation and the vision teacher's advice to place the student where he or she can function most effectively. Don't neglect the visually impaired student's input in choosing a location, but be aware that if you simply ask "Can you see the chalkboard?", the answer will probably be "yes." Instead, have the student stand at various distances from the chalkboard and see if he or she can read what is on the board or tell the difference between circles and squares.

It is usually impractical to have a student constantly walk up to the chalkboard for a close look. Moveable seats, hand-held telescopic lenses, and closed-circuit television are useful solutions for some students with low vision. As Ellen suggested, it is always helpful if a teacher can

describe what is being written on the board.

The last two problems discussed by Ellen and Sarah—social acceptance of the visually impaired student and determining how much help is enough—are difficult ones. A visually impaired child may be more "handicapped" by the attitudes he or she encounters among sighted people than by the visual disability itself. In a school setting, the teacher's attitude toward any child who is "different" is of great importance, as it sets an example for other children to follow.

Successful teachers treat visually impaired children naturally and fairly, as they treat all their students. They do not reject, overprotect, or pity such children. They expect such children to meet realistic academic goals and to behave in a socially acceptable manner. They encourage friendly interaction and cooperation between visually impaired children and sighted children. They value the contributions that each individual brings to the group.

Some teachers find it appropriate to conduct learning activities about visual impairment for the whole class. Students may enjoy trying to identify people and objects through touch, sound, taste, or smell while blindfolded, for example. Information about optical aids, braille, mobility, and the roles of various specialists can be presented. The class may benefit from visits by disabled people in the community. Such activities encourage the discussion of feelings and attitudes and help children avoid misconceptions and stereotypes about the visually impaired. The creative teacher can do much to set the scene for acceptance and understanding of the visually impaired child.

Sarah has not had to deal with one problem affecting social acceptance that troubles many classroom teachers—mannerisms which the visually impaired child may have. These mannerisms, which might include such behaviors as rocking or poking the eyes, are much less common than classroom teachers fear. They do occur among some students, however, particularly those who have been totally blind since birth.

Not as much is known about the causes and remediation of such behaviors as we would like. Some people feel that mannerisms result from the student's need for stimulation or from the lack of opportunity to learn appropriate behaviors through imitation.

A child exhibiting mannerisms must be individually assessed to determine the causes of the problem; plans for remediation should be made by a team including the parents and other professionals. The responsibility for remediation does *not* rest with the classroom teacher, but because the teacher must deal with the social outcomes of the behaviors, he or she is naturally concerned about alleviating the problem. Helping the child develop more awareness of his or her body and a better understanding of appropriate responses is one way the classroom teacher can help. Another is to observe when the child exhibits the behaviors and plan to fill the time with more purposeful activities.

Remember, however, that if a child has a problem with mannerisms, it has developed over a number of years. You alone cannot—and should not be expected to—solve the problem. If the child is not receiving some help from other professionals, talk to the resource teacher immediately about arranging for such help. The key to success is again teamwork.

Speaking of teamwork, let's see how Ellen and Sarah are progressing at midyear.

4. Making It Work

BRUCE: . . . and I was over at Paul McBride's house yesterday. He's captain of the high school wrestling team. He's wrestling in the state championships at Springfield next week. He's blind. My Mom and Dad may let me go.

SARAH: It's nice that you two guys got together. Tell me, Bruce, how do you like the unit we're doing on "Roots" this month?

BRUCE: It's neat. I'm almost finished with my family tree. You know, my great-great-grandfather Hulst was in the Dutch navy. And Grandma Hammond told me she used to run an ice cream parlor. Not bad, eh?

SARAH: Not bad at all. When we used the overhead projector today, could you see it all right?

BRUCE: I couldn't see too well from my seat, and I don't like to keep getting up close to the screen 'cause the shadow of my head disturbs the other kids. But when I came around and looked right into the projector, I could read the words OK.

SARAH: Good. Since we found out how well that works and you and Mr. Payne put the wheels on your chair, things are going pretty well, hunh?

BRUCE: Yeah, and I'm going to the low vision clinic soon. I might be able to get an aid that would help me see the chalkboard from farther away.

SARAH: You know, Bruce, now that you're typing and using the tape recorder more, we may need to get another set of shelves for storage. The one we got at the beginning of the year is pretty well filled. I'll ask the principal about it.

(Enter Ellen)

BRUCE: Hi, Ms. Miles! I've got to run, or I'll miss the bus. Thanks for taking me to meet Paul. He's super!

ELLEN: Hello and goodbye, Bruce. There's someone else I want you to meet—Mr. Wallace. He works for a big computer company downtown.

BRUCE: OK. Bye!

(Exit Bruce)

ELLEN: That's what I like to see . . . a happy youngster.

SARAH: Ellen, as fond as I am of Bruce, I find he really is taking up a lot of my time and energy. I try to think through all my lesson plans twice to make sure everything will work with Bruce, but then I get behind so I don't have time to ask you to prepare a test or worksheet. Or I feel like I'm asking for too much help. Then I end up coming to school at 7:00 to prepare materials myself. I'm tired!

ELLEN: I know what you mean, but don't hesitate to ask for help. That's what I'm here for. But I do need a few days notice so I can work things into my schedule.

SARAH: I'll have to be better organized and plan ahead. But I guess that'll be good for all of us.

ELLEN: We teachers of the visually impaired need to do more planning too. We seem to spend most of our waking hours preparing and adapting materials. We ought to think of some ways of getting help with these day-to-day tasks. You know, the principal over at Walt Whitman Elementary has a real good thing going for a visually impaired child—she organized a group of volunteer parents and elderly people. They each spend an hour or so every week preparing worksheets and tests on the large-print typewriter or going over purple ditto sheets with dark ink. Pam's teacher doesn't know how she ever got along without their help.

SARAH: Sounds great! Let's see if we can get something like that started here. Maybe Bruce's mom would help us organize it. It would certainly free me up a bit for my planning.

ELLEN: And I'd be able to spend more of my time helping Bruce with those specialized skills he really needs, such as use of his vision and developing his listening skills. It can benefit both of us.

SARAH: We've got quite a few tests coming up soon. Do you think Bruce should be expected to do all of them? It sometimes takes him twice as long as the other kids to read the material. I could just excuse him from the tests.

ELLEN: No, Bruce needs to earn whatever grade he's entitled to. If you start changing the rules or excusing Bruce from tests, it's going to be really hard for the other kids to accept him as a member of the class. Or for him to accept himself. Don't lower your expectations for Bruce.

SARAH: OK, OK . . . I can buy that. But what about the time problem? Math tests are especially a problem. We can't expect the other kids to sit around for half an hour while Bruce finishes the test. And I'm sorry, but I really don't want to keep him after school. That could get to be a bad habit.

ELLEN: There are a couple of things we might try. If a test really needs to be long, I could administer part of it during the time I work with Bruce. But you might also think about the way you design your tests. Lots of teachers find they can shorten tests without losing their value if they cut down on the number of each type of question. For example, you might give Bruce three long division, three multiplication, and three story problems instead of ten each. It's the concept that's important, not the repetition.

SARAH: I guess that really goes for all the students, doesn't it? I'll look more carefully at the tests I'm giving and let you know if I need some of your time to administer any of them.

ELLEN: Is Bruce having any trouble getting the daily math assignments done? You could use the same strategy there. Give him a few of each type of problem and then assign more of those with which he has difficulty. That way he'll get the practice he needs without getting frustrated over how long it takes him compared to the other kids.

SARAH: That sounds like a reasonable approach. You know, this is another example of how having Bruce in my class is forcing me to take a good, hard look at myself as a teacher and at what I'm doing with all my students. I have to get organized, set goals, cooperate with others, be sure of myself. And a lot of the adaptations I've made have helped all the students.

ELLEN: I'm glad you feel it's turning out to be a good experience for you. I think Bruce has benefited enormously from being in your classroom. Oh, before I forget, that new social studies book you're going to be using for the spring semester isn't available in large print yet. There's really a lag between publication in print and production in braille and large print. Luckily I can get a taped transcription, though, so Bruce can use that for longer reading assignments and use the regular print book in class. Since he's going to the low vision clinic soon to see about getting an aid, he may well find he likes the regular print better.

SARAH: I know he likes the pictures in the regular print books better. Whenever I've got an extra copy, I give him one so he can have the colored pictures like the other kids. Oh, there's my ride. See you next week.

ELLEN: OK. Bye.

Like many teachers who have taught mainstreamed visually impaired students, Sarah is finding that preparing for class sometimes requires more time than it did before, but the extra preparation and resulting adaptations are often beneficial to the entire class. Because Bruce is only one of 30 children in Sarah's fourth-grade class, it would be unrealistic to

expect her to plan all class activities solely with Bruce's needs in mind. Often, however, the visually impaired child's needs coincide with those of many other children. Almost all children, for example, can benefit from activities which help them listen effectively or observe the environment with all their senses.

Sarah is also learning to be flexible in providing materials for Bruce; he is now using large print, tape, and regular print. This is the most practical approach to materials selection, as several factors must be considered: availability, the student's visual skills, and the student's grade level.

Activities in preschool and kindergarten programs are usually largely oral, and materials for the visually impaired child are generally not a serious problem. Games, storytelling, arts and crafts, and similar activities require little or no modification. In the primary grades, some special materials and instruction are necessary, as there is more emphasis on independent reading. Most blind children are introduced to braille around first grade, and children with low vision begin to use large print and/or optical aids.

For many years, it was believed that students with low vision should only read large print because it would reduce eye fatigue. Recently, individual low vision aids and nonprescription magnifiers have been greatly improved. In addition, opthalmologists, optometrists, and educational researchers have found that reading standard print is no more tiring than reading large print. *Quality* of the print, *contrast*, and *illumination* appear to be more important than print *size*.

Because use of large print has several disadvantages—a limited number of titles are available, the texts are generally expensive, bulky, and colorless, and the visually impaired student may be uncomfortable about using such a text—the student should try different print sizes and use the smallest size that can be read comfortably. As reading efficiency increases, the student may be able to shift from large to regular print.

In the later elementary grades, reading assignments increase significantly, and most visually impaired students make considerable use of tape recordings, records, and sighted readers, just as Bruce is beginning to do. Note-taking skills and effective study habits are critical as the student prepares for junior high school, high school, and possibly college-level education, each of which demands a higher level of independence and specialized skills.

Sarah's suggestion that Bruce's mother be asked to help set up a volunteer organization for their school indicates that she and Ellen have established a good working relationship with Bruce's parents. Such a relationship is essential. Although educators have traditionally agreed that a child's family life plays an enormously important part in that child's growth and development, the communication between parents and teachers has in the past been minimal in many educational programs. To-

day, however, federal law mandates that the parents of a disabled child participate in the planning and assessing of their child's educational program. To meet this requirement, Ellen and Sarah have scheduled brief monthly conferences with Bruce's parents. Let's listen in on one of these conferences.

5. Working With Parents

MRS. HAMMOND: I'm sorry my husband couldn't come today—he had to go to Kansas City. We're really pleased with the way Bruce is getting along in school this year. It seems almost unbelievable that 5 years ago we were told there was no program here for Bruce.

ELLEN: Things really have changed for visually impaired kids in the last 5 years, and parents like you have had a lot to do with those changes.

SARAH: Well, let's have a look at Bruce's record. As you can see, his marks are above average. But he's almost a full grade behind in reading level. I think it would be a good idea for him to be assessed by several tests that will help us plan his reading program better. If it's OK with you, we'll start them on Thursday morning. Would you like to come and observe?

MRS. HAMMOND: I'll see if I can. Anyway, I appreciate your asking. I get the feeling you both are as interested in Bruce's progress as I am. It's a good feeling.

SARAH: We need your help, too. After all, he's only in school 6 hours a day!

MRS. HAMMOND: Well, I like to know when he's doing well at school. And when he's not doing well, I need to know that too so I can help when he gets home.

SARAH: Well, you certainly helped him with that social studies picture display on current events last week. Even though Bruce had trouble seeing some of the fuzzy newspaper pictures he brought in, he really understood what each one showed. I know that was no accident; you must have spent quite a bit of time with him discussing the pictures the night before. I really appreciate that kind of help, since I can't always adapt every activity just for Bruce.

MRS. HAMMOND: Bruce values being able to do the same activities as his classmates so much I figure it's well worth my time. I think being expected to do just what the other kids do has really helped him feel more independent. And so have the daily

living skills you've been doing with him, Ms. Miles . . . last Saturday he did a whole dinner for the five of us—went shopping, cooked, served, and cleaned up. Hamburgers, macaroni, and potato chips.

ELLEN: Sounds delicious! Tell me, were you able to contact Gene and Barbara Clark?

MRS. HAMMOND: Yes, I had a nice visit with Barbara the other day. It's amazing—they've gone through so many of the same experiences we have. Going from school to school, being told that Bobby couldn't learn . . . well, instead of making brooms, he's making "B" grades in college. And he's just become engaged.

SARAH: It sounds as though parents can give each other an awful lot of support.

MRS. HAMMOND: I guess we share a certain kind of kinship. Barbara was telling me that there used to be a really active group of parents of visually impaired children. Do you think you could get something like that started again, Ms. Miles?

ELLEN: Well, I can give you some names and help you plan some programs, if you like, but basically it has to be your group. You decide what you want the group to accomplish and how you want to do it.

Parents appreciate straight talk. Set aside some uninterrupted time and a comfortable place for regular parent conferences. Be a good listener; parents can tell you much about how their child learns.

Bruce is fortunate that his parents, his regular teacher, and the resource teacher function together as an effective team. There is a helpful give-and-take of information. Concerns are expressed freely. Progress is reviewed, and plans are made. No one person deserves the credit for Bruce's successful experience in the regular classroom. They are doing it together. It's the only way that can work!